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A GARDEN CITY IN THE MAKING

By JEAN d'AUTEUIL RICHARD, S.J.

Staff member, École Sociale Populaire, Montréal, Member of the Housing Committee of the Montreal Planning Commission, Social Adviser to the Union économique d'habitations.

Montreal shares, with all big industrial cities, the sad privilege of having developed a very grave housing problem. Unchecked industrialization, total lack of social interest on the part of public authorities, large-scale speculation in land and construction, are responsible, here as elsewhere, for a tragic situation, with broad social and even spiritual implications.

For housing goes far beyond questions of brick and mortar. Good housing is a basic condition—perhaps the most important in the material field—for a nation, morally as well as physically healthy. It is a proven fact to-day that bad housing conditions are the hot bed of juvenile and adult delinquency, of tuberculosis, venereal diseases, social unrest, etc. The country at large is now paying a terribly high price, in terms of money and human capital, for its total lack of practical concern in the past about this major issue.

In 1940, these considerations prompted a group of Montreal citizens, led by two men who had enjoyed the privilege of spending some years of special study and investigation in Europe. It was no mean task. A number of attempts and projects had been periodically announced, for the last fifteen years, but none had ever managed to clear the first hurdle and get under way. The war situation was bound to add a host of new, and seemingly, insuperable difficulties and the promoters knew that they would have to begin from the bottom. But they were confident that by their ideas, goodwill and enthusiasm they would gradually bring into being the elements necessary for success.

They began crusading for better housing conditions. This was the opening of an educational campaign which was to reach across the whole Province. Within three years, their speakers addressed tens of thousands of citizens in Montreal and in some twelve other cities and towns. Films on housing were shown, articles written for the daily press and for magazines, to bring home to the people the physical, social and moral effects of housing on the community at large. The growing interest shown towards housing problems in all circles, social, economic and even governmental, is undoubtedly due, for a considerable part, to this vigorous campaigning by the Montreal pioneers.

The group, now formed into a non-profit organization under the name of *l'Union économique d'habitations*, was closely studying the Montreal situation, the Canadian housing legislation and the available means to provide good housing for the low-wage earners who constitute the majority of the Montreal population. These investigations led to the definite conclusion that war conditions, as affecting the building industries, and the expiration in March 1941 of the second part of the National Housing Act, made it absolutely impossible to attempt any low-cost housing development.

Hence *l'Union économique d'habitations* was faced with the following dilemma: to fold its arms, let things go and wait for the end of the war, or to swing over to the utilization of Part I of the National Housing Act, still in force, destined to help a higher income group. The sit-down and wait policy didn't appeal very much to the dynamic leaders of the U.E.H.; so, they decided to go into the field of medium-cost housing, where they could help the middle class better its none too-good

housing conditions and reverse the alarming downward trend of home ownership in the metropolis. (In 1943 it had reached a low of 11 per cent.). This necessary detour imposed by circumstances would give them valuable experience when they came to tackle the low-cost housing problem and contribute to solve the formidable tasks of reconstruction, as soon as the war was over.

By this time, a minimum of capital had gradually assembled from the growing number of followers, and the co-operation of the National Housing Administration, of lending institutions and of the municipal authorities had been secured.

A co-operative building society, *Les Cités-Jardins du Québec*, was founded. Its job was to do the actual building at cost, plus 10 per cent. for administrative and general purposes.

The plan was to bring down the high cost of construction—one of the main causes for the small percentage of home ownership in Montreal—through a co-operative effort in getting land, supplies and services, and through new techniques in the building process itself. They followed as closely as possible the pattern of mass production and standardization. Notwithstanding the adverse conditions due to the war and to the difficulties met by all pioneers, this process was to prove its soundness and the production cost has been gradually lowered in spite of the rising cost of labour and building supplies.

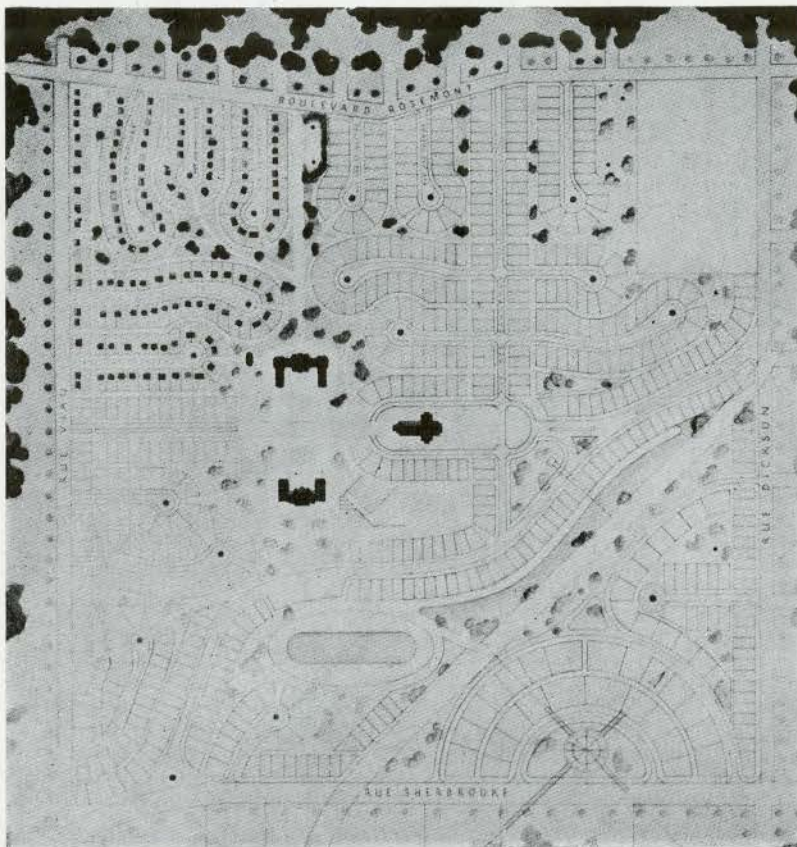
In the fall of 1941 a first development of 16 houses was begun and completed for May, 1942. This was meant to be the first unit of a self-contained development of 600 houses to be called *La Cité-Jardin du III^e Centenaire de Montréal* (1642-1942). On the 2nd day of August, an official inauguration brought together a crowd of some ten thousand people, among them leading personalities from all walks of life. It was a tangible proof of the results of the previous educational campaign. In the same fall a second development of 18 houses was begun and finished in the summer of 1943. A third development of 97 houses is being completed and a fourth of well over a hundred houses is on the point of being launched.

The Garden city of the Tercentenary of Montreal, on the beautiful Rosemont plateau, is gradually taking shape, with its elaborate planning of dead-end streets, lawn strips, park and playgrounds. There is an abundance of space, light and air instead of the crowded rows of city flats, the narrow streets and dark alleys, the stuffed air of a big industrial city. It can easily be imagined what a boon this is for the children!

Special attention has been given to community planning and human relationships. As a result with the growing number of families, a fine community spirit is developing, a practical community life is being organized: religious, cultural with educational meetings and lectures, economic with co-operative buying, recreational, etc.

Whatever success has been so far attained,—and considering that the endeavour started financially from scratch and developed in the midst of adverse conditions, this success is very great indeed—is due to competent leaders, who little by little won the full confidence of the various agencies, public

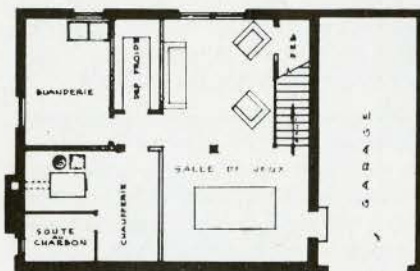
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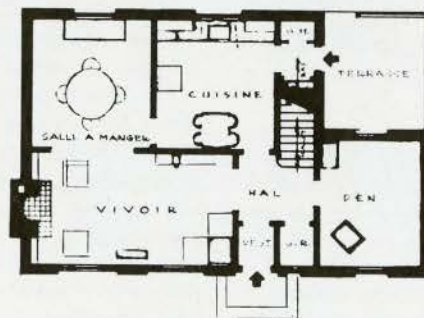
Architects at various stages of the development were Messrs. Payette and Crevier, Messrs. Gascon and Parant, and Rodolphe Lajoie, who is now in charge of the present extensions.

BLOCK PLAN

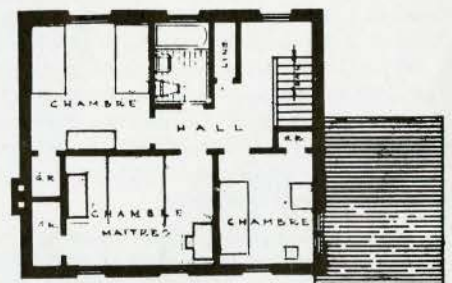
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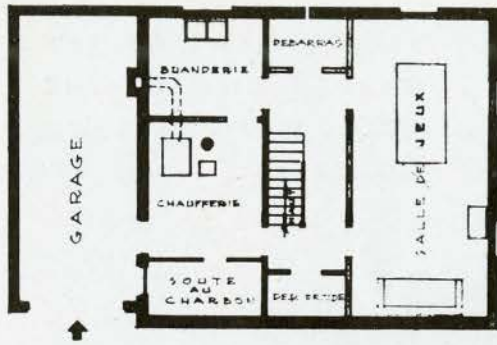
BASEMENT



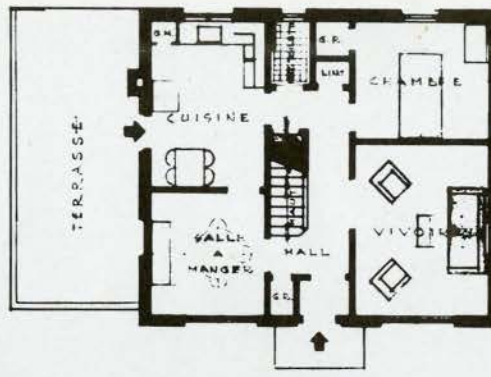
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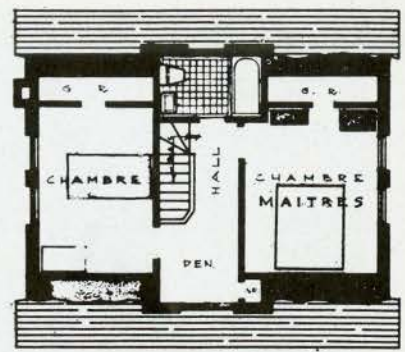
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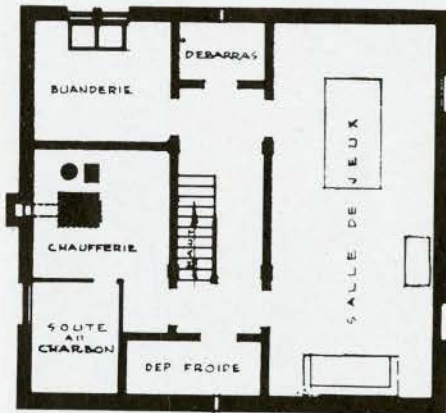


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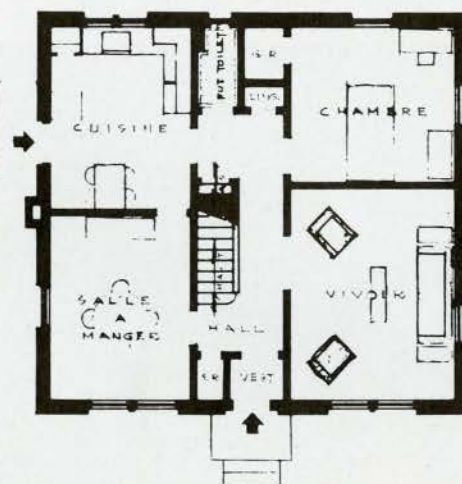


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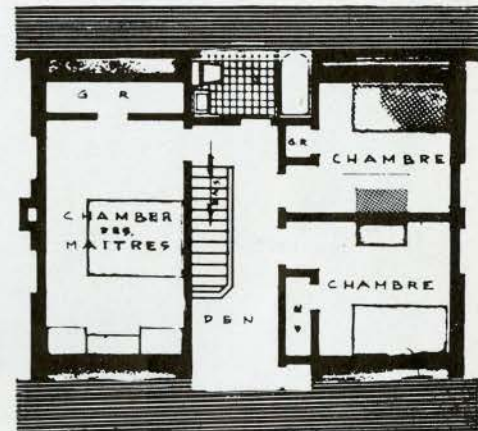
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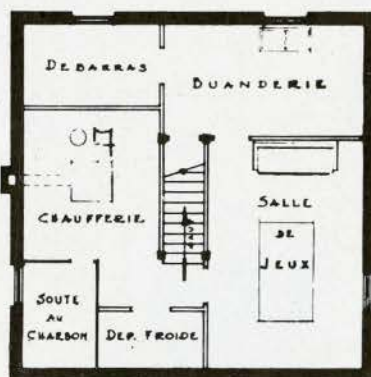


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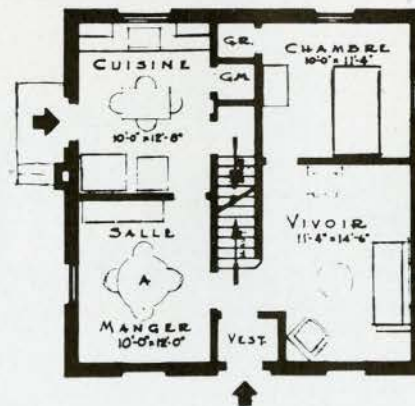


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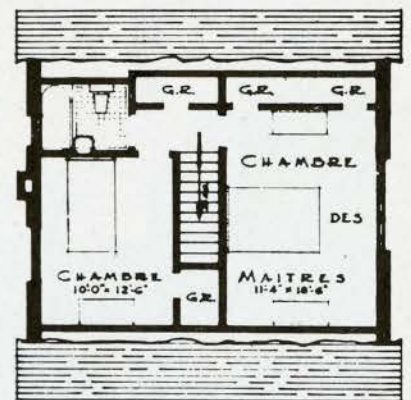
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BASEMENT



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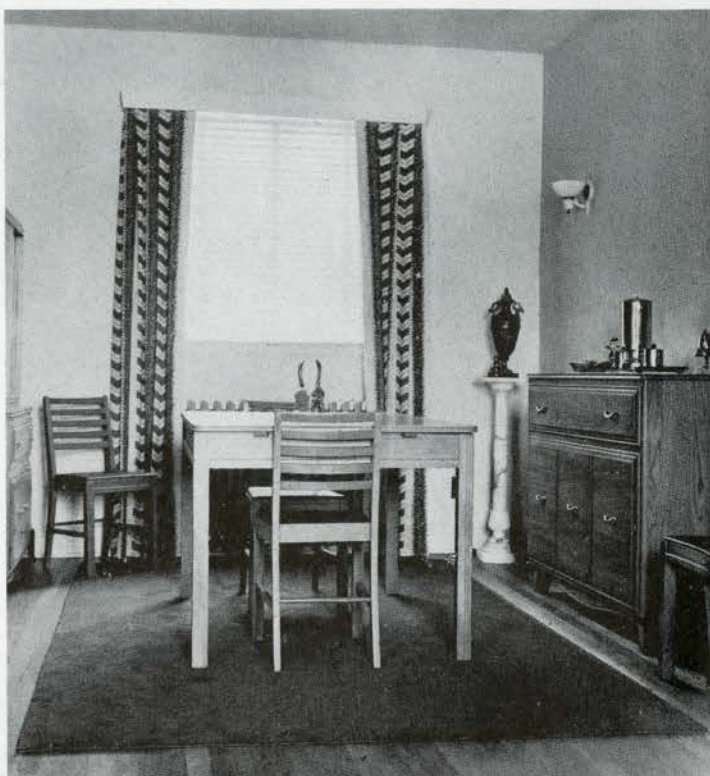
STREET VIEWS OF THE
GARDEN CITY OF THE
TERCENTENARY OF
MONTREAL.



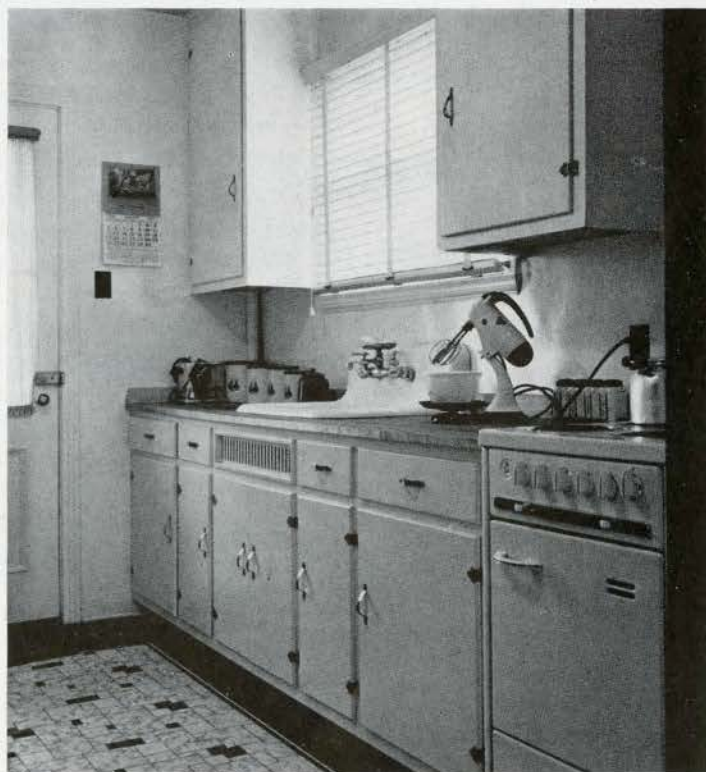
TYPICAL INTERIORS



LIVING ROOM



DINING ROOM



KITCHEN